

ADDRESS
OF THE
STATE
COMMITTEE
OF
Correspondence
TO THE
CITIZENS
OF
Pennsylvania

1808

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ADDRESS
OF THE STATE COMMITTEE OF
CORRESPONDENCE,

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CITIZENS OF PENNSYLVANIA.

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ALL human institutions partake of the imperfections of our nature; and therefore it is, that in free governments, the decision of the greater number, is the received rule of action, because it is rightly presumed that the many will not be so apt to connive at evil as the few; nor can they be so easily corrupted: very frequently measures which even well meaning men conceive to be most conducive to public happiness, are no more than the indigested and rash emotions of their prejudices or their resentments—and tend directly to destruction.

In popular elective government, like ours, if there is not a vast superiority of numbers devoted to the maintenance and practice of the most exact virtue—men who prefer the general good, to any momentary or selfish gratifications, the government itself will be in danger of being precipitated into despotism. This danger will be more imminent, if correct information is not possessed by the people; or if when addressed to them, it is not fairly and clearly explained—dispassionately weighed,—and well understood.

It may at first sight appear to be a paradox, but it is a truth—that free governments exist but in the disinterestedness of the people; the end of government itself being the happiness of the whole, or of the greater number, the personal interests of a few must ever yield to the greater interests of the many;

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thus in the operation of the elementary principles, as in the election of representatives to frame and to administer the laws, there will ever be a diversity of opinions, so there must ever be a disinterestedness of some individuals, which will combine the diversified opinions of the many on that point which promises to produce the greatest portion of comparative good; or what is equivalent thereto, to prevent most effectually the pressure, the approach, or even the apprehension of evil.

There must ever be in free government a fair and honest compromise of individual opinion, as well as of personal predilections, in order to give the system at once energy and efficacy. It is on this foundation only that free government can exist; it is on this principle that the voice of the majority decides; it is on this principle that your prosperity and your strength depends; it is by this principle, that you select legislators, and fill the battalions of your militia; those who make laws, give to the public their time, talents, and experience; and those who are ready to take their turn by the ballot, to arm, or if required to perish for the preservation of the public liberties,—to defend your wives, your children, and all those endearing affections which are comprehended in your homes—act upon this magnanimous principle, which is the basis of our government, *the disinterested sacrifice of individual interests for the preservation of those of the whole people.*

Here too it is that a free government, resembles the dearest object of domestic man—in this point consists at once the virtue and the happiness of a people; and here it is that every people is most exposed to temptation, and incur the greatest miseries if they do not resist it: it is on this weak side of human passion, that all who seek to betray nations to their own purposes, resort to those allurements and delusions with which unbridled turpitude is so prolific.

At this point popular government is most assailable, and against it you always find the enemies of freedom direct their open and their insidious attacks.

The Committee to whom the Convention, held at Lancaster, on the first Monday in March last, confided the useful and delicate trust, of concentrating and diffusing intelligence, and keeping up the usual communication between the friends of representative democracy, have not until this period found it necessary to address the people in the manner that they now do. We had seen with peculiar satisfaction, in the calmness, the liberality, and the unanimity which pervaded the convention itself, the reality of those principles which it is our pride to dwell on, that honest sacrifice of individual partialities and of individual prejudices upon the altar of public good which, was never more conspicuous than in that convention. Every topic touched during its sittings, was treated with one accord, and a dignified temper, that was at once an honor to the republican cause, to the state, and to the members who composed the convention. And, we had calculated upon *one general election* in which the republican party would have escaped malevolence from every quarter, but from that which has been hostile to the liberties of the nation.

It is a solemn truth, which as six members of this committee were members of that convention, they are perfectly qualified to state,.....that there was no difference in debate,.....no objection to any measure or man proposed for public confidence,.....and that the choice of the convention fell by an open, individual, and unanimous vote of all present on Mr. SIMON SNYDER of Northumberland,——who was accordingly recommended to the people of Pennsylvania for the important office of Governor.

We perceive with great pain, that a solitary attempt has been made to impress upon the people of this commonwealth, the belief of transactions having taken place at Lancaster, which never occurred, and which have no sort of foundation; which are, we regret to be compelled to say, destitute even of the shadow of truth.

We regret it, because the names of some men, the most respectable and venerable in private life, and in

every station of social and civil man, have been used and abused to give sanction and color to the deception. Here it is fellow citizens that we are assailed, here it is that by deceit and misrepresentation we are at once exposed to evils of selfish or wicked men amongst ourselves, and to the assaults and the derision of those men who lose no opportunity to bring our popular government into disrepute, and to ascribe to the principles of representative democracy, the vices and the crimes of men who betray or disgrace those principles.

It would seem to be sufficient in our estimation, to assuage the envious or the angry passions in men who possess American feelings, that our country stands at this moment in a position critical and unexampled in the annals of mankind. Outraged as our nation has been for years past; scarcely a year has elapsed since the flag of our country, and the waters that wash our shores were stained with the blood of our citizens; menaced by formidable armaments on the east and north east; the Indians stirred up and invited to havoc on the west and south west; the south but a few months rescued from the foulest and most unprovoked and unjustifiable conspiracy that ever was devised against a nation; the ocean cut off from the enterprizes of our citizens, by the wanton violence of one power, and by the retaliating violence of another; laws or decrees passed to tax our property and to prohibit our neutral commerce with the civilized world, but through the ports of a nation whose oppression we shook off for the comparatively paltry consideration of a three penny tax on tea—thus circumstanced, by causes operating from abroad, no man who loves his country should seek to disunite us at home.

We cannot but deplore the infatuation that could at this period, merge all the momentuous concerns of a whole people, in the miserable motives of personal resentment or disappointed selfishness.

Yet it is at this time, and in the state of Pennsylvania, that the cruel attempt has been made, first to dishonor the name of the venerable William Mont-

gomery of Northumberland, by publishing under that respectable name, assertions destitute of truth; and next, to use that name to impose the same falshoods upon the people of this commonwealth, and of the United States at large.

In an address and resolutions of a meeting, held at Sunbury in Northumberland, on the 28th of June last, we find the following allegations.

“Whereas it appears that our opponents, in principle, are attempting to divide and weaken our efforts by scattering the seeds of jealousy and distrust, among the republican citizens of this state, and of the United States, by reports that some of our republican electors will not be governed, by what is believed to be the general opinion of the party, but will, when re-assembled in their electoral college, vote for *James Madison* for president, in opposition, to the general understanding of the convention, held at Lancaster, who put them in nomination.

“And since it appears to us that the convention in their nomination of electors, to elect a president and vice-president of the United States; proceeded with the understanding that the electors, when elected, should vote for *George Clinton* for president and *James Monroe* for vice president, as neither of those gentlemen are inhabitants of this state, permit us to observe, &c”.

Upon a perusal of these unfounded allegations or assumptions, we were naturally led to examine from what source such deceptions could have proceeded. On examining the names of those delegates who were at the Sunbury meeting, we can find only one name, that of Mr. *Abraham M. Kinney* who was a member of the legislature and of the Lancaster convention; as he was not a member of the committee which brought forward, he probably may not have seen, or read the above allegations; because if he had, he must have known that the allegations and assumptions were untrue, and contradicted them; we then look to the committee appointed to draft the proceedings, and we find that the venerable *William Montgomery*, *Samuel Maclay*, and a third person composed the committee; and in the detailed proceedings we find the following declaration, made by a member of that committee:

"We regret our inability to gratify our readers with a full report of the sentiments expressed by him, (Mr. *Samuel May*!) but this regret is diminished by the address to the citizens of this county, in the forming of which, *as he was one of the committee, it may fairly be considered as his sentiments*, and which address embraces a comprehensive view of the subject before the meeting."

It is incumbent on this committee in discharge of the trust imposed on them, to do this act of public justice to the convention, which honored them with their confidence, and to afford the venerable Mr. Montgomery at the same time, this public testimony of our respect, by declaring that we believe him to have been imposed upon, and incapable under any other circumstances of affixing his name to a thing so dishonorable: this justice is also due to the citizens of Northumberland at large, who have been insulted and imposed upon in the same way.

We think it incumbent on us to state, upon the *personal knowlege of six of the members of this committee*, that the subject of a candidate, or the name of a candidate for the Presidency, or Vice-Presidency of the United States, was never brought before the convention at Lancaster, nor any question or topic touched or discussed during the whole period of its sittings, in which the name of Mr. Madison or Mr. Clinton nor of any other person was used or glanced at.

And we think it fit to allege in like manner, that on the day after the convention had closed its proceedings, vast numbers of the printed copies of the *protest of the seventeen* was received at Lancaster, and that, among those who then remained, it excited the most open indignation and disgust. On this subject the state committee have spoken more at large than was desirable, yet, not more at large than was necessary to a fair and explicit disabuse of the public.

On the question of the Presidential election, it is our duty to address you, as well as on the important election of a governor, which the proceedings in Northumberland appeared at first to endanger, and would endanger, if the people of that county were not true to their old principles.

It is now for the people of Pennsylvania to determine upon questions involving the dearest and most sacred duties of men and citizens. *The good of the whole?* is the first consideration. The means of securing that good most effectually? is the next. How has this been done hitherto?

Thus the last question becomes the first, because if the means heretofore have been sufficient, and above all, if they are the only means by which you can now act, there is no alternative, but in acting as republicans hitherto have done with effect, or abandoning the *principles and cause together*: it is in vain to make pretences or professions, when they are contradicted by acts and deeds: to the simple and eloquent exposition made by the people of Adams county, we refer you for the only course of proceeding within your power: it is in vain that men *profess*, who do not *act* as republicans; for if you abandon in practice, your professions are all that remain, and you are in open opposition to the principles of the republic.

For the venerable George Clinton, this committee, and we believe the whole people of Pennsylvania entertain that just reverence and respect, which his early services and his virtues inspire; from republicans this tribute is due; and is as cheerfully given; but we now submit to the nomination of Mr. Madison in preference to Mr. Clinton; because the choice has been made in the usual manner, and because the choice itself is good; because not to accord with that choice would be to subject us to the reproach of being *veering politicians* and faithless to our country and our principles.

In like manner, the virtues, services, and character of Mr. Munroe, we hold in the most respectful and sincere estimation; and for the same reasons we do not prefer him to George Clinton as vice-president; and moreover because we cannot suppose that either of them would willingly become instruments of division and distraction—or at this period endanger that union of national sentiment, which is so requisite to

deter foreign enemies from using our divisions to our utter destruction.

Beside these motives arising out of the fundamental principles of popular representative government, and which alone would outweigh all other considerations; we have motives cogent, rational, and irrefragable. Mr. Madison, beside being the candidate regularly selected, has displayed a vigor of mind worthy of the nation and the station for which he is proposed in the very recent transactions with foreign nations.

Mr. Monroe by common consent, is out of the question as president; and the consideration for the people to make, are now reduced to the *question of principle*, as it regards the choice made in the usual way—from which we cannot deviate without violating our principles.

The state of the world at the present time, requires not only great previous knowledge of political relations, but faculties ripe and quick to act upon events that may arise; we very much question if any man coming newly into the chair of state, at this period could with the best and most perfect faculties of mind, in a short time completely possess himself of the necessary knowledge for the station which Mr. Madison already possesses; and we believe no other man so likely to pursue that wise and virtuous policy which Mr. Jefferson has pursued, and in which Madison has so honorably and ably participated. As to the injurious aspersions thrown out against Mr. Madison, they merit no good man's attention; the like have been for years reiterated against Mr. Jefferson, and the world has seen with what contrary effects—his virtues have triumphed in the triumphs of his country over enmity and calumny—as we entertain a confident hope those of Mr. Madison also will.

Having thus expressed, as we were bound to do in the discharge of our trust, our opinions on the best policy of the state in relation to the national interests; it is now our duty to address you specially

on what is of equal moment and importance to this commonwealth.

The democratic convention at Lancaster, acting as the convention of democratic members of congress at Washington had done, put in nomination a well known citizen, against the probity and honor of whose private life calumny has wasted itself in vain. Mr. SIMON SNYDER was before the public three years ago: and the people of Pennsylvania should keep in mind as a warning, the base deceptions by which an innocent but uninformed part of the people were led astray; and they should remember what evils and shame the state has been since exposed to, in consequence of the success of that deception.

Fortunately indeed the constitution of the state contains the clause of limitation, and the candidate opposed to the interests of the state at this time, is not entrenched to the chin behind the executive patronage; nor are his politics dubious or his principles unknown to the people at large.

Our duty then in addressing you is reduced to very narrow limits, as it regards the state executive; the bitterest enemies of Mr. Snyder cannot refuse him the tribute of acknowledging that he is an honest man and a republican. The warmest and most eager supporters of Mr. Ross, can offer no other recommendation of him, *than that he is a lawyer*—while his hostility to our principles of government, are matters of notoriety and of record.

To the good sense of the people we confidently submit the decision; satisfied that they are not their own worst enemies; that when they are to choose the centinels which are to guard over their rights and interests, they will choose with propriety.

To the people of the state at large, we take this opportunity of making this earnest and dispassionate appeal; the only cause of all the evils to which this state has been exposed, for years past, is the insatiable lust of office; men capable of obtaining by the multifarious means of acquiring honorable support

with which the bounty of providence has blessed our country, have been diverted from useful pursuits, in search of offices affording a pittance of subsistence without much labor; and by acquiring offices have too frequently acquired habits of extravagance and speculation, ruinous to themselves and greatly pernicious to the commonwealth. This passion for office has dishonored individuals of the legislature, and placed that body at times in the trammels of executive influence, to the great shame and injury of the commonwealth. This cause it is which has stirred up so many distractions, and produced so many odious persecutions and oppressions. You are bound to watch your representatives, and to be particularly cautious how you elect men to representative trusts, who convert your confidence into the most shameful means of barter for individual emolument.

Remember that the elections approaching are not for the interest of this or that man—but for the safety and liberty of the whole—watch the operations of the emissaries of foreign nations—the nation which has subsidized all the monarchies of Europe, would in all probability, give a larger subsidy to destroy your government, and render America subservient to her desperate purposes—we have been informed that enormous sums have been appropriated for the purpose of influencing our elections—be careful—be watchful—be Americans; and let your posterity bless your wisdom, as we bless those whose valor and virtue gave us liberty and independence.

MICHAEL LEIB,
JOHN DORSEY,
JAMES ENGLE,
MICHAEL BRIGHT,
ROBERT M'MULLEN,
THOMAS LEIPER,
WILLIAM DUANE,

*Committee of Correspondence, for the State of
Pennsylvania.*

Philadelphia, July 25, 1808.

